

In SHARP Focus at the International AIDS Conference 2006

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*Editor's note: **In SHARP Focus at the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2006)** is an initiative of the Open Society Institute's Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP). Its purpose is to provide information about key sexual health and rights issues, activities, and debates (paying particular attention to those addressing sex workers, men who have sex with men and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons – or, in new terminology 'same sex practicing individuals') as these emerge during AIDS 2006. The scale and scope of the IAC and its Global Village, precludes our ability to encompass all activities or disputes, but we will try to give a sense of innovative, pressing and emerging initiatives and debates.*

***In SHARP Focus** is directed toward those attending the conference as well as those who are not. It will include interviews, event reports, analyses and a schedule of key upcoming events. There will be five issues released. This first newsletter provides participants and observers with information about how to follow and/or navigate interesting conference activities by listing key sexual health and rights-related "mapping" efforts designed to guide participants in and through the conference and Global Village. The next three issues will be distributed during the conference. A final issue, to be released immediately following the conference, will give a summary and "round up" of some of the main points of discussion and contention, as well as relevant follow up plans emerging from the conference. For more information or to share events, strategies and activities, please contact Susana T. Fried at susana.fried@gmail.com, Marissa Hildebrant at marissahilde@yahoo.com or Rachel Thomas, OSI/SHARP at rthomas@sorosny.org.*

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND INFORMATION ABOUT EVENTS, STRATEGIES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS. WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO DISSEMINATE THE INFORMATION. PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO ALL WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED.

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Table of Contents

- 1.** Background to the International AIDS Conference, Toronto, 2006, p. 1
- 2.** Interviews, p. 3
- 3.** Guides and Roadmaps, p. 4
- 4.** Blogs and newsletters, p. 5
- 5.** Global Village: opportunities and space for networking and alternative organizing, p. 7

1. Background to the International AIDS Conference, Toronto, 2006

Since the first conference filled only a few rooms at Atlanta's convention center in 1985, the International AIDS Conference has evolved from a gathering of 2,200 scientists involved in AIDS research, to this year's anticipated 20,000 attendees consisting of health workers, people living with HIV/AIDS, politicians, HIV/AIDS professionals, sex workers, activists—a dauntingly large forum for community programming, networking, and leadership response. As the conference location moves

every two years, the focus shifts from Atlanta's discussions of virus-infected monkeys to the "Face of AIDS" at the 1988 Stockholm conference to "bridging the gap" between industrialized and developing nations in light of new combination therapies presented at the 1998 Geneva conference. More recent conferences held in South Africa and Thailand gave scientists from industrialized countries a glimpse of the challenges in delivering antiretroviral therapy in developing countries. Indeed, the range of discussion gradually amplified, so that the 2000 Durban conference addressed the alarming rates of infection specifically among women.

This year's conference falls on the heels of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) review in May/June 2006, at which civil society representatives publicly registered their disappointment in the United Nations' and governments' lack of progress on stemming the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For many observers, the inadequate attention of the UNGASS review to the alarming shortages of health care workers and HIV professionals in developing countries, the weak structure of many health care systems, environmental issues, and discrimination belied a global commitment to making progress where it is urgently needed. Nevertheless, the IAC is not, primarily a space of policy advocacy or resolution – but it is a space of activism. For example, while the United States is funding the attendance of about 175 government employees and representatives of nongovernmental agencies, no IAC has been held in the United States since 1990. A satellite session on Sunday will address the restrictions of U.S. funding policies in needle exchange, protecting sex workers, and abstinence-until marriage. Moreover, the protests will continue as a variety of organizations register their disapproval of projects supported by a number of major private foundations that involved "rescues" of sex workers who do not, necessarily, wish to be "rescued." (See www.researchforsexwork.org). On August 14, a number of organizations working on women and HIV/AIDS will march and rally to ensure that governments are held accountable for their response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic as it affects women and girls globally and in Canada. Further protests are expected to arise in response to the claims of fraudulent elections propagated by an unnamed outgoing IAS (International AIDS Society) Governing Council Member and office staff in Geneva.

Half of the \$20 million cost of the conference comes from a wide array of institutional sponsors and commercial exhibitors, while the other half of the cost is raised from registration fees that range from \$150 to \$995, depending on the participant's country and/or scholarship eligibility. However, a recent posting on *Aids_Asia* from an activist in India expressed difficulty in circumventing the conference's late fees after being denied scholarship. Craig McClure, Executive Director of the IAS, responded by providing unsuccessful scholarship applicants with a refund for the late fee. Even still, some delegates have been denied visas, including 20 AIDS workers from African and South Asian countries who received scholarships.

In the midst of a tradition of controversy and commitment, this year's theme entitled "Time to Deliver" promises to bring recognition for the amazing work being undertaken by organizers, service providers and researchers around the world. The United Nations Development Programme and the Community and Leadership Programmes of the conference will present the first Red Ribbon Award to five of 25 finalists for community action in health care, addressing stigma, discrimination, and gender inequality, and providing support to AIDS orphans and children. Pathfinder International has selected a "Peer Educator Idol" for demonstrated ability to communicate HIV/AIDS issues in creative ways. Prevention Now! will launch their global campaign to increase access to female condoms throughout the world. For the first time, the conference will host a MSM stream of events and workshops. Please read on to find out more about upcoming events of interest.

2. Interviews

Each issue of **In SHARP Focus at the IAC (AIDS 2006)** will feature interviews with participants at the IAC. This pre-conference issue offers two. The first is an interview with Meena Seshu, a well-known HIV/AIDS and sex workers' rights activist, about why she will be attending the IAC. The second is with Carol Jenkins, scholar, researcher and activist working on issues related to HIV/AIDS, sex worker and sexuality-related rights issues. Carol has been associated with a range of organizations, including the Futures Project, and is currently directing a new project, entitled, *Alternative Visions*, based in Thailand. The interview with Carol takes up the question of why she will NOT be attending AIDS 2006.

Meena Saraswathi Seshu, SANGRAM (India)

OSI: What is your experience with the IAC? Have you attended previous IAC conferences?

MSS: I was involved in Manila at the Asia Pacific pre-conference meetings, and we had great sex work 'theme sessions' there. Bangkok [*ed. note: IAC 2004*] was mind blowing. We used the meeting to bring to the notice of our political leaders the issue of women's sex work in Baina, Goa, and sex worker deportation to their states of origin. This protest helped us to bring our issues to center stage. The idea of the global village is also truly inspiring, particularly since the pharmaceutical companies seem to be taking over the 'booth space'. Another problem is the visa and other hassles that community members face. We need more global advocacy regarding this. I can come up with all the problems that such a world conference can bring up, but I think the positive can easily counter the negative in this case.

OSI: Why are you attending this conference? Who are you representing? What are your expectations? What kind of work do you expect to be doing (e.g., networking, lobbying, running or participating in workshops, etc.)?

MSS: I represent SANGRAM [an HIV/AIDS organization in India] and VAMP [an Indian sex worker collective] at this conference, focusing on issues of women and sex workers and political advocacy on stigma and marginalization. I will be speaking in three sessions on rights based approaches to claim rights for all women.

OSI: Please describe yourself, your work and your organization.

MSS: My work focuses on building the capacity of sex workers' groups to negotiate condom use with their clients and generally to assert and defend their own rights. My organization, SANGRAM, is a HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and support organization, which works with socially marginalized populations in Maharashtra State, India.

Editor's note: Meena Seshu was featured in the Spring 2006 *Sexual Health and Rights Program (SHARP) Newsletter*, entitled "Spotlight on Meena Seshu, SANGRAM: Sex Worker Rights in Rural India."

Carol Jenkins, PhD, Director of Alternate Visions, Thailand

OSI: Please describe your work on HIV and AIDS.

CJ: My work on HIV began in 1991 in Papua New Guinea and still continues. I have now worked in about 28 countries, conducted primary research, set up national second-generation surveillance systems, designed regional and country strategies for major donors and designed and implemented large scale interventions for injecting drug users, sex workers and MSM.

OSI: Describe your previous experiences with the IAC. Have you found participation to be useful? Not useful? Please explain.

CJ: Yes, some meetings have been very useful, and yet not all. Durban was good as was Germany and Japan many years ago. More recently they have become fiestas. Bangkok was great, but only in the Global Village. The papers were not interesting, there were few debates, and outside demonstrations served as the only place to be heard for those who disagreed with major discourses.

OSI: You have been at the forefront of insistence that there be greater space and attention devoted to issues connected to men who have sex with men, transgender folks and sex workers. This IAC seems to be giving a bit more attention to these issues than in the past. Is this your sense as well? If so, what do you think accounts for this?

CJ: I have been insisting on space for sex work issues, but for this conference the only space has been reduced totally to a few main conferences sessions and networking activities in the Global Village. It would seem that this is, in large part, the result of U.S. pressure, despite little US financial investment.

OSI: Why did you decide NOT to attend the IAC this time?

CJ: My paper on violence against sex workers was rejected despite the relevance of the topic and the strong methodology. It makes me wonder if it was the subject matter that led to its rejection. So, I could go to hang out with my friends in the Global Village, but I'm concerned that the section will be kept off to the side and will have no influence on the main meeting. Until sex workers have political clout there will be continued oppression, which is definitely getting worse. The IAC has accommodated this anti-prostitution discourse. At a time when so much force is building up against investments for sex workers, the meeting should have emphasized that- instead it went the other way.

OSI: Please describe yourself, your work and your organization.

CJ: Trained as a medical anthropologist and human biologist, I worked for 10 years on human growth and nutrition in developing countries, a career path that led through infectious diseases straight to HIV by the early 1990s. Since then I have served as Principal Research Officer, Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research, the Head of Social and Behavioral Research for Sexual and Reproductive Health at ICDDR, B (Bangladesh), Resident Advisor for Family Health International, Bangladesh, Senior Scientist for Social and Behavioral HIV Prevention Research at the Division of AIDS at NIAID (NIH), Senior Regional Advisor for the Asia-Near East for USAID, and have been a consultant for a large number of international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors. Presently I am director of a new company, Alternate Visions (www.alternatevisions.org), which is working in Fiji for UNAIDS and planning to work in Pakistan and Papua New Guinea.

Editor's note: To see Dr. Jenkins' March 2006 report, "Violence and Exposure to HIV among Sex Workers in Phnom Penh Cambodia," produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development, please visit <http://www.alternatevisions.org/publications/Cambodiarapereport.pdf>.

3. Guides and roadmaps: getting to events of interest

AIDS 2006 has spawned a number of initiatives designed to help overwhelmed participants and observers navigate the conference and Global Village venues. The main conference website contains a drop-down menu with "roadmaps" covering a wide range of topics (such as aboriginal peoples, African/black diaspora, faith-based, prison, and many more). Go to: www.aids2006.org/PAG/ProgrammeAtAGlance.aspx. We focus here on those closely tracking sexual health and rights-related initiatives.

HUMAN RIGHTS: Produced by OSI's Law and Health Initiative, "Now More Than Ever: A Delegates' Guide to Law and Human Rights at AIDS 2006" offers an overview of legal and human rights-themed sessions at the IAC. It encompasses activities related to a full range of human rights issues, such as women's rights, children's rights, and the rights of marginalized groups such as injecting drug users, prisoners, sex workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, and persons in need of palliative care. A summary guide is also available. Go to: www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/law/articles_publications/publications/guide_20060802

MSM (men who have sex with men): A collaborative effort comprising Canadian and international AIDS organizations, *MSM & HIV: Advancing a Global Agenda for Gay Men and Other Men who have Sex with Men* is a series of MSM-related activities taking place leading up to and during the week of the AIDS 2006 Conference. Beginning with a pre-conference two-day satellite meeting, and continuing with abstract sessions and skills-building workshops, satellite events and activities in the Global Village, *MSM & HIV* will bring together an internationally diverse group of gay and bisexual men, other men who have sex with men, and the organizations that work with them to explore the wide range of issues connected to MSM and HIV/AIDS in the developing and developed world. Topics include: issues for HIV-positive MSM, wellness and other approaches to gay/bi/MSM health, sustaining MSM organizing/networks, research and epidemiology, human rights and law, mobilizing and sustaining MSM leadership, and Global Fund support for MSM activities in developing countries. Go to: www.msm-aids2006.org/.

WOMEN: ATHENA (Advancing Gender Equity and Human Rights in the Global Response to AIDS), The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, and Coalition for a Blueprint for Action have produced a "Guide to Women and AIDS-related events at AIDS 2006" which provides a comprehensive schedule of events focused on women and AIDS at the IAC and its Global Village. Go to: www.data.unaids.org/pub/BrochurePamphlet/2006/20060727_GCWA_BP_WomenAIDSGuideToronto2006.pdf. ATHENA has also published a summary guide of ATHENA-sponsored and co-sponsored events, including a women's march and rally (Monday, 13 August, 7 am at the Metro Hall Square), strategies to address gender based violence, and access to treatment and care. The publication can be downloaded at www.athenanetwork.org/docs/AthenaOverviewAIDS2006.pdf.

YOUTH: The Youth Programme, sponsored by the AIDS 2006 Local Host and United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada) has issued a *Youth Pocketbook Guide to Navigating International AIDS Conferences*, which includes a roadmap of all youth-related AIDS 2006 sessions and can be viewed at <http://youth.aids2006.org/files/Youth%20Pocketbook%20Guide%20-%20AIDS%202006.pdf>. Events geared toward youth delegates include a daily youth orientation and planning session, satellites on defining a role for youth in HIV/AIDS policies, the use of physical education and sports in HIV/AIDS education, discussions of abstinence-based models, psychosocial support, and workshops on youth-led HIV prevention programs. A number of youth-focused sessions address sexual health and rights issues.

4. Blogs and Newsletters

In the 21st century, no major conference would be complete without newsletters and blogs to track it, and to provide virtual space for communication and registering of opinions. Kaisernetwork.org is the main conference webcast and information about how to access it is provided below. The remaining newsletters, blogs described below present progressive perspectives and a commitment to sexual health and rights.

Kaisernetwork.org/aids2006

This free online health policy news and information service provided by the *Kaiser Family Foundation* is the official webcaster of the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto. Live webcasts, transcripts, along with additional kaisernetwork.org coverage, will be accessible during the IAC.

www.Globalvillage.aids2006.org

The Virtual Village website will provide interactive opportunities to engage with the conference and, more specifically, the Global Village. Activities will include webcasting of Global Village events and sessions, live moderated e-forums focused on Conference themes, and E-discussion boards.

Actblog02.livejournal.com and Actblog01.livejournal.com

Wolf, an HIV-positive gay man, and Sasha, an HIV-positive woman who is originally from Africa, will blog about their lives, about living with HIV, and about the bigger issues affecting people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) in Canada. Both bloggers will report from conference.

Chezstella.org

Stella is a Montreal-based sex workers rights organization and Maggie's is a Toronto-based sex workers rights organization. The two will be distributing a newspaper addressing sex work-related issues which will be available in French and English during the IAC. Three on-going blogs, Stiletto Lounge Blog, Conference Blog, and Actions Blog will cover sex-work related events, networking spaces, and conference updates.

Panosaid.org

Panoscope will serve as a southern perspective magazine distributed daily during the conference, with a focus on relating issues facing the global South in the fight against HIV/AIDS, including the scale-up of treatment, care and prevention, with the realities of people living with HIV/Aids within their own countries. *Panoscope* is part of a series of media training activities by Panos™ Global AIDS Programme. Contact Risha Chande-risha.chande@panos.org.uk or Johanna Hanefeld - jhanefeld@gmail.com.

PLANetWIRE.org

The US-based Communications Consortium Media Center site will provide regular updates with news from the conference, as well as contact information, related events, facts, and figures. CCMC will send regular alerts to the media directing them to PLANetWIRE.org.

Rhrealitycheck.org

Building on its reporting at the UN High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, *Advocates for Youth* will offer perspectives on youth issues – particularly on abstinence-only prevention policies, the role of the U.S. government in the global AIDS arena, and analysis on important reproductive health news. Coverage will begin with the youth pre-conference and continue daily throughout the conference.

Thewall2006.org

"The Way to Accessible Learning and Living (The WALL)" is a service of the 2006 Skills Building Workshop Program of the XVI International AIDS Conference, which provides an interactive skills building space and a networking facilitation center.

TimeToDeliver.org

Sponsored by the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP) and Harm Reduction Coalition, this blog will be open to public posting and will include coverage on: United States domestic and global policies; prevention research and policies, funding, testing, prevention and treatment, discrimination and stigma as promoted by public policies and programs, drug users issues and research, jails, prisons and the system of incarceration, racial justice, women living with HIV, gay men and other men who have sex with men, and youth.

5. Global Village: opportunities and space for networking and alternative organizing

The Global Village was initiated at the Bangkok conference in 2002 as a space for both delegates and non-delegates. The networking zones within the Global Village are intended to bring together local and international groups in spaces focused on key populations, issues or geographic regions. This year's Global Village hosts over 200 different NGO booths, marketplace booths, lounges and activity areas.

OSI booth (F-425, Metro Toronto Convention Center, South Building, Hall D)

At the booth, SHARP will distribute reports and resources, including a CD-rom on sex worker advocacy issues; a donor mapping about support for sex worker health and rights efforts; a case study analysis of legal and policy environments for sex workers in 8 countries; and a compilation of articles on the anti-prostitution pledge.

LGBT networking zone

The519.org [a Toronto-based LGBT organization], ARC International [a Canadian-based international LGBT organization], and Amnesty International are helping to coordinate programming and activities within the LGBT Networking Zone of the Global Village (a separate space from the MSM networking zone). The LGBT networking zone will be a space to discuss LGBT issues as a matter of fundamental human rights and to host events with guest speakers. Topics include institutional strengthening and best practices in LGBT organizations working on HIV/AIDS issues in the global south, gaps in documentation and opportunities for interactive dialogue, and more.

MSM networking zone and the MSM & HIV booth

Devoted to helping conference participants interested in the relationship between HIV and MSM get the most out of the conference, an MSM-themed conference handbook will be available. The Networking Zone is being coordinated by a partnership between ACT, AIDS Vancouver, and Action Sero-Zero and will provide opportunities to share information with other delegates in workshop and networking sessions. Located beside the MSM Networking Zone, the MSM & HIV booth will provide exhibitors with the opportunity to educate delegates and the public about the work they do. On Sunday, August 13, the Networking Zone will be transformed into a bathhouse-style area devoted to HIV prevention and wellness approaches to HIV/AIDS care.

Women's Networking Zone

This space is intended to focus on the leadership of HIV positive women, highlight innovative work, link global and local voices, raise the visibility of contentious and neglected issues, and develop strategies to address women's rights and HIV/AIDS. The week will be framed by the Twelve Statements of ICW, the Coalition for a Blueprint on Women and Girls and HIV Manifesto, and the

Barcelona Bill of Rights. The Women's Networking Zone will be coordinated by ICW, Voices of Positive Women, Blueprint and ATHENA.

Stiletto Lounge Sex Worker Networking Zone

Hosted by Montreal sex worker group *Stella* and Toronto sex worker group *Maggie's*, the zone will feature performances, workshops and meetings with sex worker groups and allies from around the world. Discussions will focus on a variety of themes: sex workers as “part of the solution”; evidence-based and rights-based projects that support sex worker organizing; sex workers’ freedom from discrimination in accessing health services, including HIV prevention, treatment and care; freedom from violence, including state sanctioned violence; freedom from the criminalization of sex worker lives and work; and all other rights that support personal security. T-shirts will be given away to promote these messages.

Youth Pavilion

The Youth Pavilion within the Global Village is a youth-focused space for meetings, forums, and evening sessions. The Youth Pavilion is a space to showcase youth achievements, facilitate networking opportunities between youth and adults, provide a youth media hub and lounge, and continue the momentum from the Youth Pre-Conference. Daily sessions are held throughout the week of the Conference to prepare young delegates for Conference participation, to create advocacy action plans, and record and report lessons learned back to their communities. Daily summaries from the Youth Rapporteur Team will also be included.

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